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CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSIAN POETRY.

PERSIAN poetry had its birth in a country conspicuous for natural advantages; a country distinguished for the mildness of its climate, the clearness of its streams, and the perpetual verdure of its plains; a country of lofty mountains, inland seas, and rolling rivers; the land of the gazelle, the camel, and the caravan; a land abounding in fruits and flowers, full of pleasant gardens, and enlivened with the songs of innumerable birds; a land where millions of butterflies of the richest colors were wafted through the summer air. In this land of the olive, the date, the pomegranate, and the fig, where the palms of the South met the pines of the North, was reared a race of men combining in a rare degree ingenuity, vivacity, intellectual force, subtlety, and refinement of manners. The Persians early acquired repute as a people of taste, invention, and artistic skill. The finest silks, the richest velvets, the costliest brocades, the softest and rarest carpets, and the most splendid tissues were of Persian origin. The art newly discovered in America and Europe, how to combine great variety of colors with perfect harmony, and to delight the eye with soft and pleasing gradations, producing a rich composite effect from the simplest elements, was original with the Persians centuries ago. The very figures of floor-cloth on which the Shah Mahmoud walked in the tenth century, the shawl patterns that adorned the heroines of Jami and of Hafiz, are imitated in the looms of England and the United States to-day. In architecture and the fine arts, as in decorative art, the Persians of the middle ages achieved a notable success. Their chief cities showed splendid palaces, filled with gems of art and sparkling with jewels, and stately mosques with white or azure domes.

Nor was it an effeminate race, steeped in pleasure and enervated by luxury, that enjoyed all these advantages. Their

bodies were strong and supple, while strikingly handsome in form and countenance. The Persians were adepts in archery and horsemanship, and were distinguished by courtesy and high-breeding. Even the common people were keen admirers of poetry, and were continually calling upon their favorite bards to recite their verses.

Persia, the Iran of the ancients, though its boundaries have varied in different centuries, has occupied substantially that portion of Central Asia extending from the twenty-fifth to the forty-fifth parallel of latitude, and its climate, like that of the United States, includes every zone, from the semi-tropical almost to the frigid. Persia's writers possessed the history and literature of the Scriptures, and some of their finest poems and allegories have allusions or adaptations from them.

In the period from the tenth to the fourteenth century all her great poets flourished, and this may be styled the golden age of her literature. It is one of the most remarkable facts of history, that at the time when the literature of what is called enlightened Europe was at its lowest ebb, when for centuries not a book was produced there worth the reading, the genius and learning of Asiatic nations shone out in their greatest luster. Not only in Persia, but in Arabia and India was produced a succession of works of the imagination, of philosophy and science, which were the sole permanent contributions to the world's literature in that age. Genius and imagination in Europe had gone to sleep, and it was literally the sleep of ages. The splendid literature of the classic period in Greece and Rome had no successors, but only the feeblest of imitators. The dark ages hung like a pall over Italy and Greece, over France and Germany, over Spain and England. The renaissance of letters and art that was to follow gave no premonitory sign. Just at this time came a great intellectual development in the East. The poetry and art of the Persians, and the imaginative literature of Arabia, produced their greatest works. It was an age of intellectual decrepitude and intolerance; an age when the inestimable remains of Greek poetry were publicly burned at Constantinople, by order of a Greek emperor; an age when the inhabitants of all Europe besides had scarcely heard of the Greek poets at all; when England was buried in semi-barbarism; when America was an unbroken wilderness. Into this unpromising age came the poetry of the Persians,—fresh, original, melodious, full of

fire, and animated by the most lively coloring. It had for its vehicle a language singularly flexible, musical, and sonorous, which has been called the softest and richest in the world. While the Arabic tongue, to which the Persian is allied, is more striking, impetuous, and strong, the Persian excels in tenderness and sweetness. A single stanza of rhymed couplets may suffice as a specimen :

“ Gulistáni tchu gulzári giuvani,
Guli sirábi abi zendegani,
Nuvaí endelibi ashretanghize
Huvaí atar bizé ráhetamize.”

If there is any one dialect better fitted than another to a sweet and melodious poetical expression, it is that of the Persians. And it is almost equally adapted to the expression of sublime ideas. Add to this gift of language the influence of climate and of picturesque scenery, in a country where the open air continually invites abroad, adorned with almost perpetual verdure, and hemmed in by lofty blue mountains, and you have conditions favorable in a high degree to the poetic temperament. To these influences of nature as seen by day succeeded the splendors of the night, when the contemplative man (for the Persian almost lived on the house-top) turned from his inward thoughts, fixing his eyes on the stars, and enjoyed the glory of the heavens. In a genial and temperate clime, with abundant leisure, free from those enervating heats which conspire on the more torrid plains of India and Arabia to wilt the energies of man, the poets of Persia were inspired to sing as naturally as the roses to bloom. We find in their compositions two leading, though somewhat contrasted, characteristics : a sensuous beauty, reflecting intimately the charms of nature around them, and thus objective in a high degree ; and a contemplative, speculative, sometimes mystical tone, peculiar to the subjective school of poetry. In these two species of composition the poetry of the Persians affords numerous specimens of the highest order. Nowhere else have the charms of natural objects, of fruits and flowers, of trees and birds, of mountains and running waters, been more finely celebrated. The reproach so often brought against the literature of classic times, that the great poets of Greece and Rome never celebrate the praises of natural scenery, does not lie at the door of the Persian bards. The rose and the bulbul, the lily

and the jasmine, the cypress and the palm, the valley and the mountain, continually appear in their verse. Then, too, in their amatory gazels, the fair one is described with passionate adoration and exuberant imagery, combined with a delicacy of sentiment that never degenerates into coarseness. Whether celebrating the praise of wine, of woman, or of nature, there is an ethereal touch which seems borrowed from the atmosphere of that halcyon clime wherein the poet worked. The best Persian compositions, alike in prose and in verse, are marked by fine poetic imagery, combined with a profusion of metaphor. All things are viewed through an imaginative medium. Sir William Jones says that the oriental poets surpass in beauty of diction, and in power of imagery, all the authors of Europe, save only the Greek lyric poets, and Horace among the Latins. Metaphor is almost the natural dialect of the Persian. Thus, a generous man is called "the rose of liberality"; fame is "the sweet savor of renown"; and to write verses is "to string pearls." Among their fine similes is the comparison of a violet sparkling with dew to the blue eyes of a beautiful girl in tears; and of a warrior advancing at the head of his troops, to an eagle cleaving the air and piercing the clouds with his impetuous wings. Allegory, or a string of metaphors, is very common; as, for example, "When the tempest of fear had torn the veil of their understanding, and the deluge of despair had submerged the vessel of their hopes, in order that they might emerge from the gulf of danger and reach the haven of safety, they turned the rudder of flight and spread the sails of swift retreat." If this metaphorical tendency sometimes degenerates (as in the poets of the Elizabethan and later ages in England) into unnatural images and poor conceits, this blemish is comparatively rare among the poets of the highest rank.

The Persian gazel is a kind of verse in which the first two lines rhyme, and then this rhyme repeats itself only in the second line of each succeeding couplet. Here is an example:

"Thee have thousands sought in vain
Over land and barren main,

"Chidher's well,—of which men say,
That thou makest young again.

"Fountain of eternal youth,
Washing free from every stain,

"To thy waves the aged moons
Aye betake them when they wane;

"And the suns their golden light,
While they bathe in thee, retain.

"From that fountain drops are flung,
Mingling with the vernal rain,

"And the old earth clothes itself
In its young attire again.

"And the timid wild gazelles
Seek it through the desert plain."

The most celebrated among the sustained poetic compositions of Persia is unquestionably the "*Shah-Namah*," or "*Book of Kings*," composed by Firdusi (A. D. 941-1020) during the thirty years of his life running from the fiftieth to the eightieth. This great historical epic relates the history of Persia from the earliest times to the invasion of the Arabs under the Caliph Omar, A. D. 641. It is as long as the *Iliad*, and is unrivaled in Persian literature for the power and eloquence of its verse. It has for one of its principal heroes Rustem, the lion-hearted, an oriental Achilles, whom Firdusi celebrates as a prodigy of force, valor, and wisdom. He subdues dragons and other monsters, has a charmed horse named Baktra, or Lightning, and is described as a mighty warrior, wielding preternatural powers. The creation of peris and of the dives of the Persians marks the undoubted originals of our fairies and genii. These fictions were probably transplanted into Europe by the Moors, an Asiatic race, and from them adopted into the romances of Spain. Firdusi's creative faculty is wonderful; his great work abounds throughout in bold and animated descriptions, and in certain portions rises to the highest sublimity. But a single specimen, in each kind, of his descriptive power, can here be given :

"Look forth, companions, cast afar your eyes,
Where yonder many-colored plain extends:
Ah! in my breast what sweet sensations rise!
Behold how each soft charm of nature blends.

"The tender silken grass invites the tread;
With musky odor breathes the fanning air;
Pure waters glide along their perfumed bed,
As though the rose gave them her essence rare.

- "The lily stalk bends with her fragrant flower,
The luster of the rose glads every bower.
- "The pheasant walks with graceful pace along;
Soft doves and mournful nightingales are nigh,
Charming the silence with a mingled song,
And murmurs from the cypress boughs reply.
- "There in gay groups, beneath the trees, beside
Those streams that through the vales in music glide,
Lovely as fairies, beautiful as day,
Are maids who wander on in sportive play.
-
- "She decks the plain with beauty as she goes,
Before her shrink, ashamed, the jasmine and the rose!
- "And there are Turkish maids that near them rove
With forms like cypress boughs, that zephyrs move,
Locks dark as musk—and see! each veil discloses
Eyes filled with sleep, and cheeks all full of roses."

The entertainment prepared for Rustem is thus described, as rendered by James Atkinson:

- "The ready herald, by the king's command,
Convened the chiefs and warriors of the land;
And soon the banquet social glee restored,
And China wine-cups glittered on the board;
And cheerful song, and music's magic power,
And sparkling wine beguiled the festive hour.
The dulcet draughts o'er Rustem's senses stole,
And melting strains absorbed his softened soul.
But when approached the period of repose,
All, prompt and mindful, from the banquet rose;
A couch was spread well worthy such a guest,
Perfumed with rose and musk; and whilst at rest,
In deep sound sleep, the wearied champion lay,
Forgot were all the sorrows of the way.
- "One watch had passed, and still sweet slumber shed
Its magic power around the hero's head,
When forth Talmineh came—a damsel held
An amber taper, which the gloom dispelled—
And near his pillow stood; in beauty bright,
The monarch's daughter struck his wondering sight.
- "Clear as the moon, in glowing charms arrayed,
Her winning eyes the light of heaven displayed.
Her cypress form entranced the gazer's view,
Her waving curls the heart resistless drew.

Her eyebrows, like the archer's bended bow;
 Her ringlets, snares; her cheek, the rose's glow,
 Mixed with the lily; from her ear-tips hung
 Rings rich and glittering, star-like; and her tongue
 And lips, all sugared sweetness; pearls the while
 Sparkled within a mouth formed to beguile.
 Her presence dimmed the stars, and breathing round
 Fragrance and joy, she scarcely touched the ground,
 So light her step, so graceful every part
 Perfect, and suited to her spotless heart."

Khokani, who died at Tabriz, in 1186, is considered the most learned of the lyric poets of Persia. Here are some stanzas from one of his gazels:

" Oh, waving cypress! cheek of rose!
 Oh, jasmine-breathing bosom! say,
 Tell me each charm that round her glows,
 Who are ye that my heart betray?
 Tyrant unkind! to whom I bow,
 Oh, life-destroyer, who art thou?"

" I saw thy form of waving grace,
 I heard thy soft and gentle sighs,
 I gazed on that enchanting face,
 And looked in thy Narcissus eyes.
 Oh, by the hopes thy smiles allow,
 Bright soul-inspirer! who art thou?"

" Where'er she walks, amidst the shades,
 Where perfumed hyacinths unclose,
 Danger her every glance pervades,
 Her bow is bent on friends and foes.
 Thy rich cheek shames the rose, thy brow
 Is like the young moon—who art thou?"

The poet Nizami, who lived from A. D. 1100 to about 1180, had fine descriptive powers, and ranks high in the romantic school of poets. Of his works, known as "The Five Treasures," the "Loves of Khosru and Shireen" is the finest. The following from Atkinson's translation is a brief specimen:

" On lofty Beysitoun the lingering sun
 Looks down on ceaseless labors long begun;
 The mountain trembles to the echoing sound
 Of falling rocks that from her sides rebound.
 Each day, all respite, all repose denied,
 Without a pause the thundering strokes are plied.

The mist of night around the summits coils,
 But still Ferhad, the lover-artist, toils.
 And still, the flashes of his axe between,
 He sighs to every wind, 'Alas, Shireen!'

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"The piles give way, the rocky peaks divide,
 The stream comes gushing on, a foaming tide,
 A mighty work for ages to remain,
 The token of his passion and his pain.

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"Around the pair, lo! chiseled courtiers wait,
 And slaves and pages grouped in solemn state;
 From columns imaged wreaths their garlands throw,
 And fretted roofs with stars appear to glow;
 Fresh leaves and blossoms seem around to spring,
 And feathered throngs their loves seem murmuring.
 The hands of peris might have wrought those stems
 Where dew-drops hang their fragile diadems,
 And strings of pearl and sharp-cut diamonds shine
 New from the wave, or recent from the mine."

Hafiz (1300-1391 ?) is prince of the poets of good cheer. His nimble fancy adorns the wine-cup with all the flowers of song. Nor is he merely a gay trifler; his gazels have a high reach of thought, and are full of every-day wisdom. As sententious as Horace, as hilarious as Anacreon, as tender as Theocritus, his poems are as full of felicities as of melodies. His favorite form is that of the gazel, and his collected poems form what is known as the "Divan" of Hafiz—a word equivalent to anthology. Many of them are devoted to love and pleasure, but others are full of lofty moralizings. The following is Herman Bicknell's translation of one of them:

"My soul is as a sacred bird, the highest heaven its nest;
 Fretting within the body's bars, it finds on earth no rest.

"When speeding from this dusty heap, this bird of mine shall soar,
 'Twill find upon yon lofty gate the nest it had before.

"The Sidrah* shall receive my bird when it has winged its way;
 Far on the empyrean's top my falcon's foot shall stay.

"Over the ample fields of earth is fortune's shadow cast,
 Where, upon wings and pennons borne, this bird of mine has passed.

* The Sidrah is the tree of Paradise.

"No spot in the two worlds it owns—above the sphere its goal;
Its body from the quarry is, from No-place is its soul.

"'Tis only in the glorious world my bird its splendor shows;
The rosy bower of Paradise its daily food bestows."

Here is Mr. Emerson's version (from the German) of the same gazel of Hafiz:

"My phœnix long ago secured
His nest in the sky-vault's cope;
In the body's cage immured
He was weary of life's hope.

"Round and round this heap of ashes
Now flies the bird amain,
But in that odorous niche of heaven
Nestles the bird again.

"Once flies he upward, he will perch
On Tuba's golden bough;
His home is on that fruited arch
Which cools the blest below.

"If over this world of ours
His wings my phœnix spread,
How gracious falls on land and sea
The soul-refreshing shade!

"Either world inhabits he,
Sees oft below him planets roll;
His body is all of air compact,
Of Allah's love his soul."

Here is another of Bicknell's translations from Hafiz:

"Zealot, censure not the toper, guileless though thou keep thy soul;
Certain 'tis that sins of others none shall write upon thy scroll.

"Be my deeds or good or evil, look thou to thyself alone;
All men, when their work is ended, reap the harvest they have sown.

"Never of eternal mercy preach that I must yet despair;
Canst thou pierce the veil, and tell me who is ugly, who is fair?

"Every one the friend solicits, be he sober, quaff he wine;
Every place has love its tenant, be it of the mosque, or shrine.

"From the still retreat of virtue not the first am I to roam,
For my father also quitted his eternal Eden home.

- "See this head devout submission; bricks at many a vintner's door;
If my foe these words misconstrue—'Bricks and head'!—say nothing
more.
- "Fair though Paradise's garden, deign to my advice to yield;
Here enjoy the shading willow, and the border of the field.
- "Lean not on thy store of merits; know'st thou 'gainst thy name for aye
What the Plastic Pen indited on the Unbeginning Day?
- "Hafiz, if thou grasp thy beaker when the hour of death is nigh,
From the street where stands the tavern straight they'll bear thee to
the sky."

The vivacity of Hafiz is marvelous, and goes far to redeem the monotony of his principal themes. He is as full of life-blood as his beloved grape of wine. He sings:

"Take an example from the roses,
Who live direct on sun and dew;
They never question after Moses,
And why, in heaven's name, should you?"

The odes of Hafiz have been for centuries the delight not only of cultivated Persians, but of the common people. They are repeated everywhere, in schools and universities, in palaces and hovels, in shops and markets. Bicknell thus renders one of them:

"Saki, come! my bowl rekindle with the light of lustrous wine;
Minstrel, chant thy lay! for Fortune smiles upon my heart's design.

"In the goblet's depths reflected, I beheld my Loved one's cheek,
Thou who yet ignor'st the rapture of the wine-cup which I seek.

"Upright fair ones, coy and charming, only for so long shall shine,
Till appears our splendid cypress, moving as the dancing pine.

"He whose soul by love is quickened, never can to death be hurled;
Written is my life immortal in the records of the world."

To the gentle Hafiz may well be applied Emerson's axiom, that the true poet and the true philosopher are one. I borrow two more translations from Bicknell:

"A thousand times be blest wine's ruddy ray,
Which drove the pallor from my cheek away.

"I reverence the hand that plucked the grape;
Ne'er molder may the foot that pressed its shape.

"Traced on my brow is 'Love'; Fate wrote it there,
To blot what Fate inscribed should no one dare.

"Slight me not, zealot, go thou hence ashamed,
For nought is slight that has by God been framed.

"So live thou here, that when thy life has fled
No one may say of thee, 'This man is dead.'"

"The morning of my future dawns; where have they placed the sun-like
bowl?

What time more opportune than this? Haste! with the wine-cup cheer
my soul.

"The house is peaceful, Saki kind; the minstrel many a jest doth fling;
'Tis rapture, and the goblet's hour; it is the season of glad spring.

"To raise our spirits when sad we are, to crown mirth's beauty as is due,
Good is the molten ruby's tide with the gold goblet's lustrous hue.

"Charmer and songster wave their hands, drunk rev'lers strike their feet
anon;
From wine-adorers' eyes hath sleep by Saki's fascination gone.

"Safe is this spot, a close retreat, for bosom-friends a pleasure-ground;
Victory's hundred gates are oped to him who hath such converse found.

"Nature, the tire-maid, ever brisk, seeing how wine sweet joy bestows,
Hides deftly in the rose's leaves the fragrant essence of the rose.

"Since zealously that Moon has sought to buy the pearls by Hafiz strung,
In Zuhrah's ear at every hour the rebeck's melody has rung."

Persian poetry abounds in expressions of the greatness of the
Infinite, like the following:

"What, thou askest, is the heaven, and the round earth, and the sea,
And their dwellers, men and angels, if with God compared they be?

"Heaven and earth, and men and angels, all that anywhere is named,
Matched with Him, lose name and being, and to nothing shrink ashamed.

"Its unnumbered billows rolling, great to thee the ocean seems;
Great the sun, from golden fountains pouring out a flood of beams;

"Yet the faithful, God-enlightened, know another wonder-land,
Where the ocean is a dew-drop, and the sun a grain of sand.

"In the forest's dark recesses hast thou marked the glow-worm's light,
In a green dell unbeholden, twinkling through the storm and night?"

"Once a pilgrim said: 'O gentle star that shinest nightly, say,
Wherefore thou appearest never in the bright and glorious day?'"

"Hear what then the gentle glow-worm answered from its mouth of fire:
'In the gloomy forest shine I, but before the sun expire.'"

Sadi stands at the head of the poet-teachers of Persia. A Dervish, a hermit, and a pilgrim, he set forth the vanity of the world, and the true vocation of man, in a series of noble apologues, poems, and epigrams, which have made him almost a world's classic. His "Gulistan," or "Rose-Garden," is in mingled verse and prose; his "Bustan," or "Fruit-Garden," is composed of tales and of moral and political reflections. He died in 1291, at the age of 102. Here are a few maxims from the "Gulistan," as translated by Eastwick:

"When, in transacting business, thou art in doubt, make choice of that side from which the least injury will result.

"Reply not roughly to smooth language, nor
Contend with him who knocks at peace's door."

"Twist not thy mustaches boastful,
Nor with pride thy weak foe scan;
Every bone contains some marrow,
Every garment cloaks a man."

"Affairs succeed by patience, and he that is hasty falleth headlong."

"He who, before he slept or took repose,
Did roses and the jasmine round him fling;
Revolving time has shed his beauty's rose,
While from his ashes now the thorns upspring."

Jami, one of the most masterly of Persian writers, belongs to the fifteenth century. He may be placed at the head of the romantic school of Persian poets, combining exquisite diction and affluent imagination with a high moral aim. These verses are from his chief work, "Yusuf and Zulaikha," translated by R. H. T. Griffith:

"Soon as the place where he dwelt she knew,
With an eager heart to the spot she flew;
Like a soul with no mixture of clay, she beheld
His beauty, which thought never paralleled.

Ne'er had she seen such a marvel, ne'er
Dreamed of a form so divinely fair.
As she looked on his splendor, she swooned and lay
In a rapturous trance with her senses astray.
She woke to consciousness slowly, and passed
Out of the swoon that had held her fast.
Her lips she opened; she fain would speak,
From that store-house of riches, rare pearls to seek.
'O youth,' she cried, 'from all evil free,
Who made thy beauty so fair to see?
By whom was the sun's own splendor lent,
And the moon, for thy forehead's ornament?
Say in what garden that cypress grew,
And what artist-hand the fair picture drew?
Whose compasses marked thy brow's delicate line?
Who curled in bright clusters those locks of thine?
Who set the young flower in the garden? Who
Fed the tender plant with the splendor of dew?
Where could a master be found to teach
Thy cypress its motion, thy ruby its speech?
Thy locks' fair letters whose pen could trace?
Who read the book of thy moon-bright face?
Who bade thee from nothingness wake and arise?
And opened to light those Narcissus-like eyes;
And that onyx lock in that pearl-casket laid,
Whence the soul of the hearer is strengthened and stayed?
Who hollowed the well in thy soft round chin,
And poured the sweet water of life therein?
Who set the dark mole on thy cheek, and spread
The raven's wing o'er the roses' bed?'

He heard her speech; and from wisdom's spring
Flowed forth the reply to her questioning:
'I am the work of that Maker,' said he,
'From whose ocean one drop is enough for me;
Heaven is but a dot which his pen has made,
And the earth but a bird in his garden displayed.
The sun is a spark of his wisdom's light,
And a bubble the world, of the sea of his might.
From atoms he made us, as mirrors to shine
With the borrowed light of his face divine.
Screened by dark curtains from mortal eye,
On his pure perfection no stain may lie;
Whatever fair to thy sight appears
Is the light of his face when thy vision clears —
Dost thou see the reflection? Then fly to him
To whom faint is that shadow, and cold and dim.
Dost thou shun the light's Author? No, God forbid!
Or dark were thy lot when that reflex is hid.
It will last but a moment, this borrowed ray,

As the bloom of the rose and her scent decay.
 Dost thou seek the eternal, the firm, the true?
 Then fix on him ever thy steadfast view.
 'Tis this that pierces our hearts with pain,
 That fair things are with us, ah! not to remain!

"The maiden listened as Yusuf replied.
 She folded love's carpet and laid it aside.
 'I heard thy praises,' 'twas thus she spoke,
 'And the flame of love in my heart awoke.
 Hither I journeyed thy face to see,
 And my head was my foot in the search for thee.
 I came, I found thee; I swooned away.
 And my life at thy feet I was fain to lay.
 But wisdom's pearls thou hast deigned to string,
 And pointed the way to the pure light's spring.
 Thou hast cut the fine hair with the word of truth,
 And repelled the love of mine eager youth.
 Thou hast lifted the veil of my hope, and shown
 The way to the sun which I never had known.
 This truth at last to my heart is plain,
 That my love for thee like a dream was vain;
 Mine eyes have been touched by the truth's pure ray,
 And the dream of folly has passed away."

Ferid-eddin-Attar, who lived in the thirteenth century, and was a Sufi philosopher, wrote the "*Pend Namah*," or "*Book of Counsels*," a fine moral poem, from which these verses are taken :

"Impartial in his goodness still,
 Equal to all is good or ill.

"One lies on Persian silk reclined,
 One naked in a frozen wind;
 One scarce can count his heaps of ore,
 One faints with hunger at the door.

"The dives before his vengeance fly,
 By hosts of stars expelled the sky.
 And kings who hold the world in thrall,
 At his great word, to ruin fall."

Jelalu'ddin Er Rûmî, who died in 1260, stands at the head of the religious or mystic school of Persian poets. His principal work, the "*Mesnevi*," a long poem full of apologues and allegory, while disfigured by numerous digressions and trivialities, has much thought and frequent splendor of expression. His mystical odes are fairly represented in this specimen :

"Seeks thy spirit to be gifted
With a deathless life?
Let it seek to be uplifted
O'er earth's storm and strife.

"Spurn its joys—its ties dis sever;
Hopes and fears divest;
Thus aspire to live forever—
Be for ever blest!

"Faith and doubt leave far behind thee;
Cease to love or hate;
Let not Time's illusions blind thee;
Thou shalt Time outdate.

"Merge thine individual being
In the Eternal's love;
All this sensual nature fleeing
For pure bliss above."

Among Persian poets who have also made a name as men of science, the palm must be awarded to Omar Kháyyám, of Nash-apûr. He was born about the middle of the eleventh century, and his life extended to the year 1123. He devoted himself to mathematics, wrote a treatise on algebra, and was one of the eight learned men appointed by the Sultan Malik Shah to reform the calendar. His astronomical knowledge, always in high repute among the Persians, brought him the title of "King of the Wise"; and, in fact, he was unrivaled in science in his own generation. But the versatility of his genius led him to poetic composition, and he embodied in several hundred *Rubaiyat*, or quatrains, his philosophic creed. Treating the problems of humanity with complete sincerity, and led by the fruit of his knowledge and reflection to regard to-day as the only certainty, he sang of things as they are. Here are some passages from Fitzgerald's translation:

"Ah, my belovèd, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regret and future fears.
To-morrow! why, to-morrow I may be
Myself with yesterday's seven thousand years.

"Come, fill the cup! and in the fire of spring
Your winter garments of repentance fling!
The bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter, and the bird is on the wing.

"Whether at Nashapûr or Babylon,
Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,
The wine of life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The leaves of life keep falling one by one.

"For some we loved, the loveliest and the best,
That from his vintage rolling Time has pressed,
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

"And all the saints and sages, who discussed
Of the two worlds so learnedly, are thrust
Like foolish prophets forth; their words to scorn
Are scattered, and their mouths are stopped with dust.

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument
About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same door wherein I went.

"With them the seed of wisdom did I sow,
And with my own hand wrought to make it grow,
And this was all the harvest that I reaped—
'I came like water, and like wind I go.'

"And if the wine you drink, the lips you press,
End in what all begins and ends in, Yes;
Think then you are to-day what yesterday
You were; to-morrow you shall not be less.

"So when the angel of the darker drink
At last shall find you by the river-brink,
And, offering his cup, invite your soul
Forth to your lips to quaff, you shall not shrink.

"For if the soul can fling the dust aside,
And naked on the air of heaven ride,
Wer't not a shame—wer't not a shame for him
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?

"Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows?

"Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us passed the door of darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

"The revelations of devout and learned
 Who rose before us, and as prophets burned,
 Are all but stories which, awoke from sleep
 They told their fellows, and to sleep returned.

"I sent my soul through the Invisible,
 Some letter of that after-life to spell;
 And by and by my soul returned to me,
 And answered, 'I myself am Heaven and Hell!'"

From these serene and lofty speculations, Omar Kháyyám descends to sing of wine and love, but with a wealth of imagery and a beauty of expression from which later Persian poets, and even Hafiz, have borrowed much.

"Morn's first rays are glimmering,
 From the skies the stars are creeping;
 Rouse, for shame, the goblet bring,
 All too long thou liest sleeping;
 Open those Narcissus eyes,
 Wake, be happy, and be wise!

.

"Nothing in this world of ours
 Flows as we would have it flow;
 What avail, then, careful hours,
 Thought and trouble, tears and woe?"

If the honest realism of the Rubáiyát and their rugged utterances of fatalism are often profoundly saddening, let us be mindful that they are but the reflection of the uncertainties that beset the life of man. And if any to whom a clear and dogmatic view of the universe, its wonder and its mystery, has been vouchsafed, should find fault with this early poet of agnosticism, let it not be forgotten that the subtlest and the wisest intellects the world has known have been those who have most modestly disclaimed all knowledge of the Infinite. This poet-astronomer of Khorasan once said to a friend, "Let my tomb be in a spot where the north wind shall scatter roses over it," and his wish was fulfilled.

The Persian tendency to idealism is never more marked than in religious poetry. Says Jelalu'ddin, the great mystic poet of the Sufis, and author of the *Mesnevi*:

"O, heart! weak follower of the weak,
 That thou shouldst traverse land and sea,
 In this far place that God to seek,
 Who long ago had come to thee!"

A pensive and sweet melancholy pervades much of their verse. Treading upon the graves of kings and the ruins of splendid cities, they sing the vanity of life in strains at once tender and sublime. Says Firdusi :

“What is glory to man? An illusion, a cheat.
What did it for Jemschid, the world at his feet?”

And Sir William Jones thus translates an exquisite quatrain from the Persian :

“On parent knees, a naked, new-born child,
Weeping thou sat'st while all around thee smiled.
So live that, sinking in thy last long sleep,
Calm thou mayst smile, while all around thee weep.”

If we, who are dependent upon translations in English, French, and German for our means of judging, find the sweetness and the compass of these Persian poems so admirable, how incomparably finer must they be in the original? Indeed, there is no poetic literature anywhere more picturesque than the Persian. Strikingly national, bearing no trace of European models (for the literature of the West had not penetrated into Persia when it was written), it is as racy of the soil that produced it as the blood of the grape so often sung by Hafiz. The great writers of English and American literature (save only a few marked originals) have been and are still dependent upon classic Greece and Rome for their inspiration and their models. Without desiring to overvalue the poetry of the Persians, it must be conceded that for descriptive power, for ideality, for lofty imagination, and for magnificence of diction, it is worthy of a high place in the world's literature.

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